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ABSTRACT

An action research study detailed a program for improving spelling achievement across the curriculum. The targeted population is composed of second and third grade students from a growing, middle class community located in a suburb of Chicago, Illinois. The problem of misspelled words in the students' writing was documented through students' writing samples and written tests. Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students' lack of spelling retention was related to isolated spelling instruction, unclear expectations, and failure to apply spelling rules. Reviews of curricula content and instructional strategies revealed a curriculum lacking a formal spelling and proofreading program. A review of solution strategies suggested by others, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of a spelling program encompassing three major categories of intervention: use of a high-frequency word list; language integrated lesson and skill building activities; and authentic assessment of students' writing samples. Post-intervention data indicated an increase in students' spelling achievement. Success was evident, especially with the high-frequency word list. Language integrated lessons and skill building activities helped students retain the correct spelling of the words. Improvement was also apparent in the students' writing samples. (Contains 17 references, and 2 tables and 12 figures of data; appendixes contain recording forms, dictation sentences, parent letters, lists of high-frequency words, grading sheets, and tally sheets.) (Author/RS)

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IMPROVING ELEMENTARY STUDENTS' SPELLING ACHIEVEMENT USING HIGH-FREQUENCY WORDS

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for improving spelling achievement across the curriculum. The targeted population is comprised of second and third grade students from a growing, middle class community, located in a suburb of Chicago, Illinois. The problem of misspelled words in the students' writing will be documented through student writing samples and written tests.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students' lack of spelling retention is related to isolated spelling instruction, unclear expectations, and failure to apply spelling rules. Reviews of curricula content and instructional strategies revealed a curriculum lacking a formal spelling and proofreading program.

A review of solution strategies suggested by others, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of a spelling program encompassing three major categories of intervention: use of a high-frequency word list; language integrated lesson and skill building activities; and authentic assessment of students' writing samples.

Post -intervention data indicated an increase in student spelling achievement. Success was evident, especially with the high-frequency word list. Language integrated lessons and skill building activities helped students retain the correct spelling of the words. Improvement was also apparent in the students' writing samples.

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The targeted second and third grade students misspell high-frequency words in their writing. Evidence of this problem was gathered from teacher observation, a pretest, and dictated sentences.

Immediate Problem Context

School A is comprised of pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, first, and second grade with a per pupil expenditure of $5,780. The enrollment is 255 students which is 69.4% Caucasian, 0.4% African American, 25.5% Mexican-American, 3.9% Asian, and 0.8% Native American. Of the students in the district, 16.1% are classified as low income, and 15.7% are limited in English proficiency. The majority of these students are native Spanish speaking. The mobility rate is 16%. The attendance rate is 94.4% and no chronic truancy exists.

The second grade average class size is 23 students. The school employs one principal, 20 classroom teachers, one special education teacher, one bilingual teacher, one S.E.D.O.L (Special Education Department of Lake County) teacher, one S.E.D.O.L.

aide and one teacher each for music, physical education, art, speech and language, gifted, social work, and learning resource center. The school also employs three teacher aides.

School A offers a standard academic program supplemented by three weekly physical education classes, two weekly music classes, one weekly art class, and one weekly learning resource center class. All are staffed by specialized teachers. In addition, every other week there is gifted instruction and bimonthly social skills instruction. Classrooms are self-contained, and classes are grouped homogeneously by age and heterogeneously by ability. Just prior to the 1996-1997 school year, one kindergarten and one second grade class was added due to increasing enrollment.

School B is comprised of third, fourth, and fifth grade with a per pupil expenditure of $5,780. The enrollment is 341 students which is 66.9% Caucasian, 1.8% African American, 26.1% Mexican-American, 5.3% Asian, and 0% Native American. Of the students in the district, 18.8% are classified as low-income, and 10.9% are limited in English proficiency. The majority of these students are native Spanish speaking. The mobility rate is 33.9 %. The attendance rate is 96.1% and no chronic truancy exists.

The third grade average class size is 24 students. The school employs one principal, 15 classroom teachers, two special education teachers, one bilingual teacher, one self-contained L.O.P. (Learning Opportunities Program) classroom teacher, and one teacher each for music, physical education, art, speech and language, gifted, social work, and learning resource center.

School B offers a standard academic program supplemented by three weekly physical education classes, two weekly music classes, one weekly art class, and two weekly learning resource center classes. All are staffed by specialized teachers. In addition, there is gifted instruction once every three weeks. Classrooms are self-contained, and classes are grouped homogeneously by age and heterogeneously by ability. Before the start of the 1996-1997 school year, one class was added to each grade level due to increasing enrollment.

School A and School B are part of a three school district. This district employs 67 full-time teachers. All of these teachers are Caucasian; 91% of the staff is female. The average experience level of the teachers is 10.7 years, and 21.8% of the teachers have a master's degree or above. The school serves three diverse communities.

All statistics were comprised from the 1995 School Report Card.

The spelling program used in schools A and B is Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich. It is integrated with the reading series. The weekly lists are based upon a phonics skill, such as short vowels, or a spelling pattern, such as changing /y/ to /i/ before adding /-ed/. On Monday, teachers give the children a pretest and then review the words. Throughout the week, teachers plan activities based upon the word list. Typical activities include completing workbook pages putting words from the list into ABC order, or using the words in sentences. At the end of the week, the teacher administers a spelling posttest. The second grade list contains ten words, and the third grade list contains 15 words weekly.

The Surrounding Community

The district is medium in size and consists of three schools. The primary school serves grades pre-kindergarten through second grade. The elementary school serves third grade through fifth grade. The middle school serves sixth grade through eight grade. The communities support the schools through numerous committees such as; Parent Advisory Committee, Parent Teacher Student Association, Band Boosters, and Los Padres Unidos. The district provides many programs in addition to academic studies. Each school also provides support services through computer labs, bilingual, tutorials, after school clubs, Spanish classes, gifted program, remedial reading, and learning disabled tutorial.

Community A has a population of 23,722. Of the students that are enrolled in the two targeted schools, 53.3% come from this community. Of the population, 83 % are Caucasian, 1% are African American, 15.5% are Mexican-American, 4% are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% are Native American. The median family income is $45,947. The community consists mainly of middle class families.

Community B has a population of 15,319. 43.5% of the students that are enrolled in the two targeted schools come from this community. Of the population, 90.6 % are Caucasian, 1.7% are African American, 3.8% are Mexican-American, 6.2% are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.2% are Native American. The median family income is $48,873. The community consists mainly of middle class families.

According to a 1990 census, Community C has a population of 4,747. No other information was available, but 3.1% of the students that are enrolled in the two targeted schools come from this community. It consists of middle-upper to upper class families.

These three communities have grown rapidly over the past 10 years. A prevalent issue concerning these communities is the referendum that will be voted on during the spring election. The proposed referendum is needed to fund an up-to-date computer lab, offer competitive teacher salaries, and adopt a new social studies series, to name a few. The last referendum, passed in 1993, generated monies to enlarge existing school buildings.

National Context of the Problem

Students are not retaining the words that they are studying in spelling. The traditional spelling program consists of a pretest on Monday, daily lessons, and a posttest on Friday. Unfortunately, these spelling words are soon forgotten to make way for next week's list of words. According to Cates "teachers frequently comment on how poorly their students spell, parents often attribute their children's failure to spell correctly to teacher incompetence, and a quick scan of student writing reveals the prevalence of spelling atrocities" (Cates, 1988, p. 101). Teachers want to teach students to improve their spelling so they can be more competent writers. However, the students feel that they do not have to be accountable for their spelling beyond the Friday test. Their success on weekly spelling tests does not lead to improvement in daily writing. Often spelling lists are comprised of words from the curriculum which are seldom used in

everyday writing. These three areas of concern are evident in our school district and nationally.

To begin with, the spelling words are not being transferred from spelling tests to daily writing. For example, often a word is memorized for a Friday test, but it is never mastered for later retrieval because it is not a word used frequently in their writing. According to Bloodgood (1991, p.204), "short-term memory provides little transfer to actual use, as evidence in writing assignments on which students continue to misspell words from the previous week's list." Additionally, Henry (as cited in Novelli, 1993, p. 41) found that "in teaching spelling the traditional way, he noticed an unsettling pattern: students performed well on weekly tests, but not long afterward they had forgotten how to spell those same words and weren't using them in their journals or other classroom writing."

When spelling is taught as an isolated subject, students feel that they only need to spell correctly when it "counts", mainly on a Friday test. Sitton (1996, p. 49) has found "students know that their spelling grades are based on spelling words correctly on a test, not on spelling in everyday assignments across the curriculum." Students are not relating the importance of spelling to any other subject but spelling itself. This lack of accountability leads students to put less effort into their spelling.

In most spelling programs the word lists are generated from the curriculum and/or based on a phonics skill. These words are often not used in daily writing by the students. In 1996 Sitton reported that spelling lists contain difficult seldom-used words. Often, these words are vocabulary words from other subjects that are encountered

during a particular topic of study. Along with words taken from other subject areas, there is usually a phonics skill or rule that is followed for the rest of the list. Cates (1988) found 30% of spelling workbooks focus on learning how to spell specific words. The phonics skill or lesson is not expanded to include words that are not on the weekly list. Therefore, the students do not apply the rules beyond the words on the list. There is no relationship between those words and the words students commonly use.

There are three components that lead to low spelling achievement in student writing. First of all, there is a lack of transferring spelling words to daily writing. Second, students are not being held accountable for their spelling in written work. Finally, students' spelling lists consist of seldom-used words. In conclusion, these three areas of concern are evident in the targeted school district and on the national level.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to document the extent of student misspellings, dictation sentences and a written test were given to the targeted second and third grade students. According to the spelling pretest data, it was found that the second and third grade students have not yet mastered all the 50 most frequently used words. In third grade, out of 43 students, there were 253 spelling errors. The 45 second grade students had 350 spelling errors. The students were also given dictation sentences to determine their spelling ability in writing. The third grade had 191 omissions and errors. The second grade had a total of 643.

Table 1

Number of Spelling Errors or Omissions, Sep' mber, 1996

	Second Grade	Third Grade
Spelling Pretest	685	253
Dictation Test	547	191

Figures one through four further show the specific number of errors which students made word-by-word. These figures allow the researchers to determine what words are most commonly misspelled. It also shows which words have been mastered by the students.

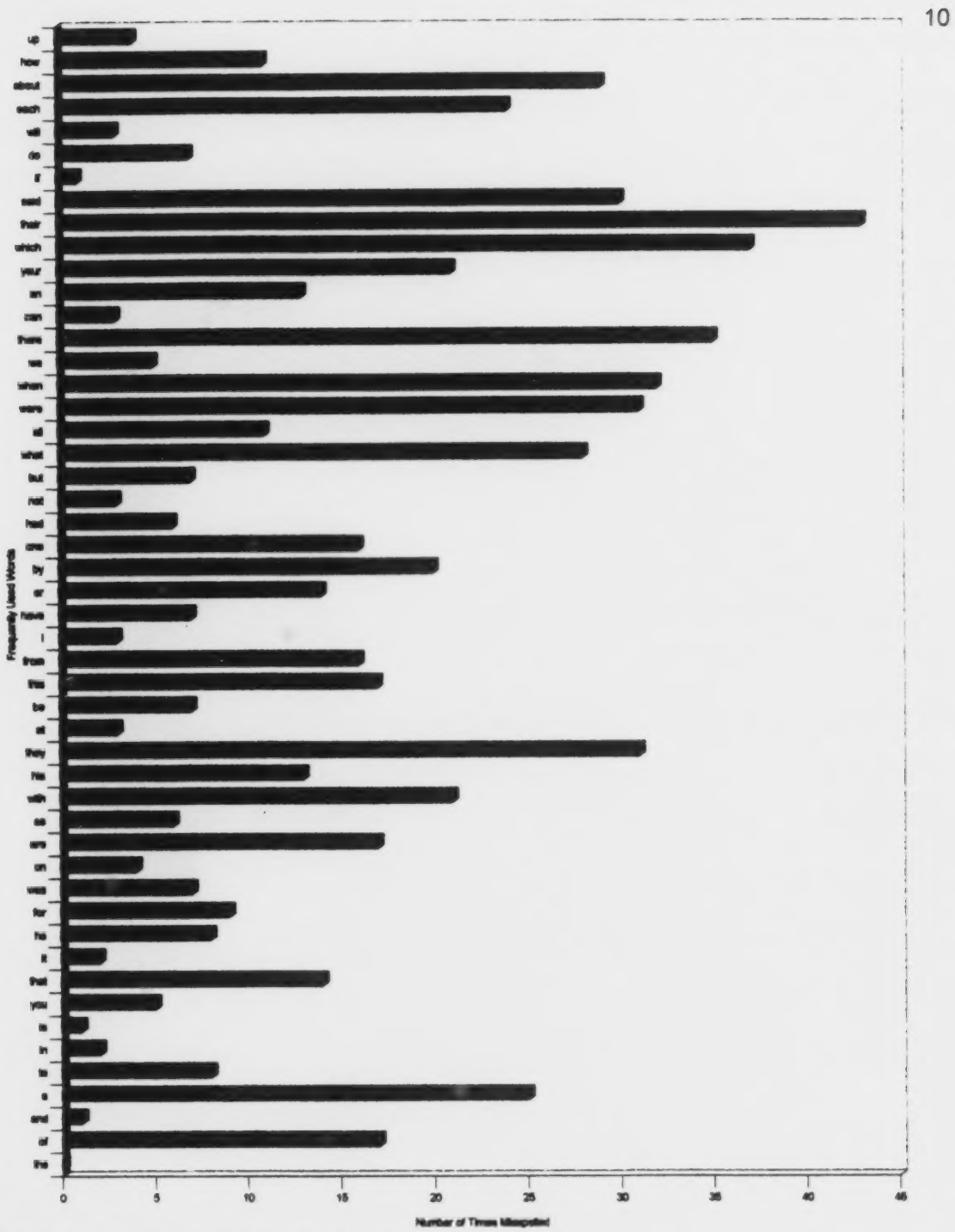

Figure 1. Second grade standard pretest

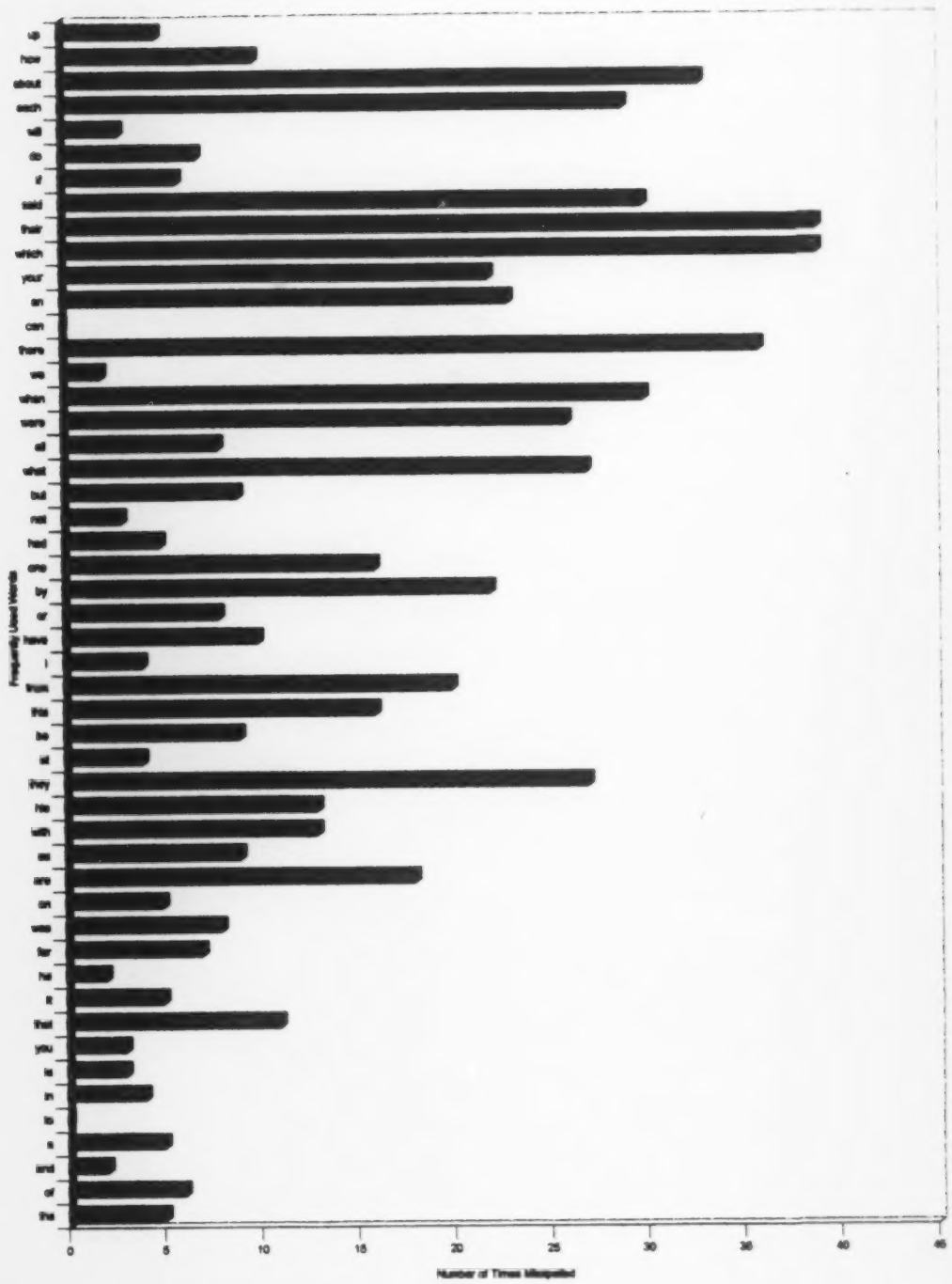

Figure 2. Second grade dictation pretest

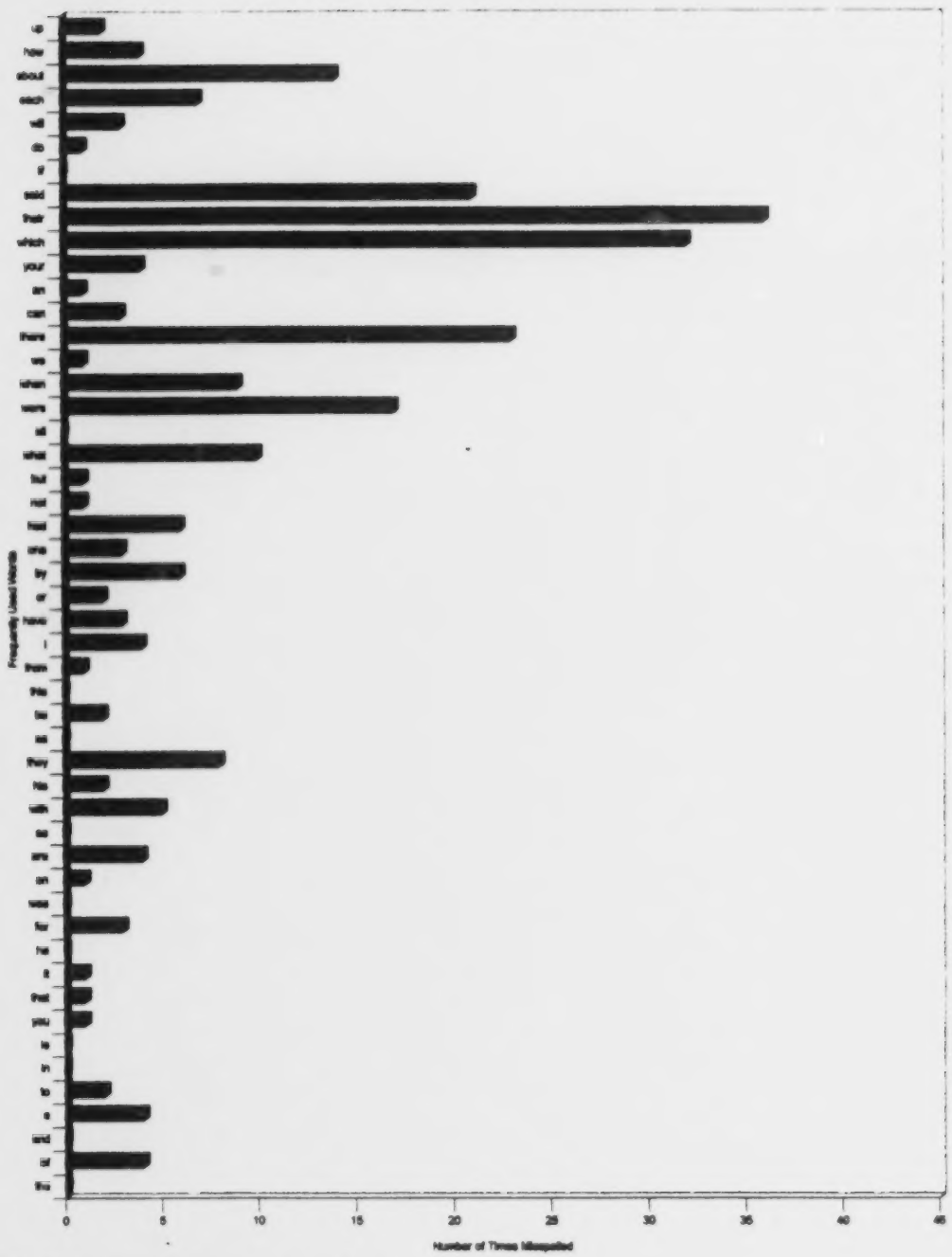

Figure 3. Third grade standard pretest

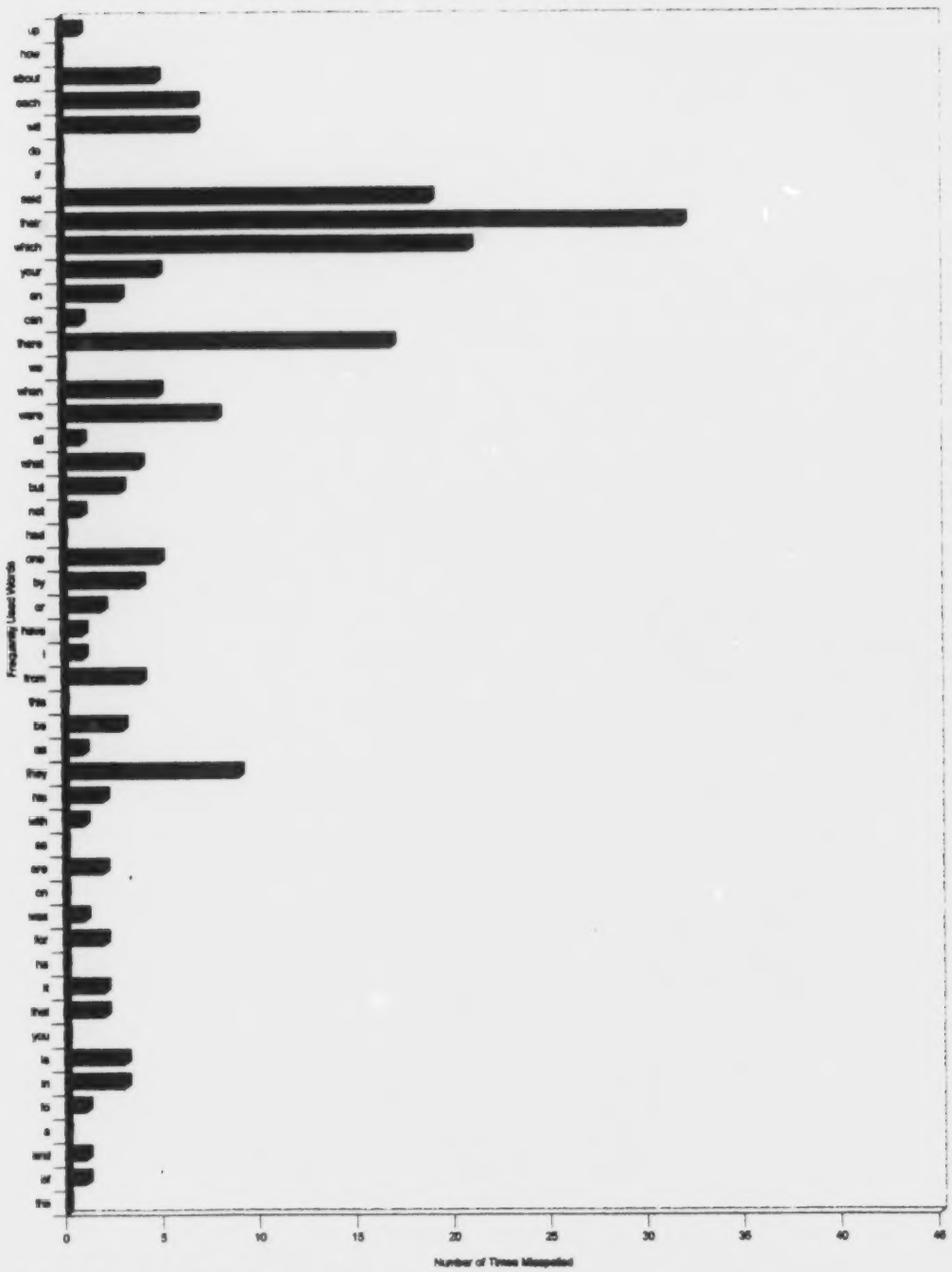

Figure 4. Third grade dictation pretest

Probable Causes

In previous years teachers have noticed that students were not transferring learning from their weekly spelling tests to their written work. After the words were tested, many of those words were either not used often enough or they were spelled incorrectly in daily writing. Also, many of the high-frequency words, which students misspelled were not part of the formal spelling instruction. The traditional spelling method; pretest, practice, and posttest, has not been successful. The transfer of learning has not been successful because the students are not being held accountable for their spelling words in daily writing.

In analyzing the school demographics, one might note that 25.9% of the district's population is of Mexican-American origin. Some of the Mexican-American students are receiving bilingual services. On the other hand, there are also Mexican-American students who are fluent in both languages. To determine if language is affecting the students' spelling performance, the classroom teacher might consult with the teacher of the bilingual program to see if language differences create a barrier for Spanish speaking students. The two teachers would need to discuss the similarities and differences of sounds and how they could be spelled in both languages. The results of the discussion would then be presented in chart form showing the phonetic sound and possible spellings in each language.

Another possible cause of poor spelling achievement may be the decrease of phonics instruction. One of the newest trends in teaching is whole language instruction. Its focus is on using themes and units to teach the entire curriculum. When reading is

taught, students concentrate primarily on the whole word rather than how the word is formed. Words are learned by sight and sound. By repeated exposure the students begin to learn the words. The students learn from the whole to the part. The intensive teaching of letter and blend sounds through phonics has decreased. Gathering information from teachers through a survey might prove useful. A survey would include questions that would ask teachers to what extent they are using whole language instruction and/or teaching phonics skills. The results of the survey would then be tallied and analyzed. If it is found that phonics skills are rarely being taught, a diagnostic test may be given to determine the level of phonetic skills of the students. The diagnostic test results would be charted to show deficiencies of specific phonics skills.

The next possible cause of decreased spelling achievement is the lack of spelling instruction time. Teachers have being given more and more material to cover during the year. Because of this, some curricular areas have been neglected in order to cover all of the necessary material. Teachers are now responsible for covering additional objectives in subjects such as social studies, science, math, and language arts. Today, most families do not have or take the time to teach their children skills such as, manners, personal hygiene, and conflict resolution. Therefore, teachers are now taking the time out of their school day to instill the values and life skills that children need. Unfortunately, in order to make room to teach this, spelling has been one of the subjects that is less emphasized in the classroom. There is a good possibility that since instruction time of spelling is being decreased, it is causing students to be poorer spellers. In order to determine if the decrease of instruction time in spelling is related to

the lack of spelling achievement, the classroom schedules of teachers would need to be reviewed. The amount of instruction time set aside for spelling would need to be totaled for the week. This would determine how many minutes are being used for spelling instruction. A bar graph could be used to compare the amount of instruction time in spelling to the students' spelling achievement level to see if less instruction time is causing poor spelling achievement.

A weak spelling curriculum could also be a cause of poor spelling achievement. When a teacher becomes an employee of a school district, he or she receives a curriculum guide for the given grade level. There are specific objectives which need to be covered for each subject area. These objectives usually coincide with the objectives of the text book series used with the particular subject area. In spelling, the objectives can sometimes be unclear, mixed in with language arts, or nonexistent. If the objectives of the spelling curriculum are lacking, this may cause a weak spelling program. A deficient spelling program could cause the students to have poor spelling skills. Each school districts' curriculum should have clear spelling objectives for each grade level.

Finally, a poor home environment could be a cause of poor spelling achievement. If spelling is to be deemed important, it needs to be reinforced in the home. A home that fosters reinforcement of spelling would have a variety of reading materials that would help the child see the correct spellings of words. A child would also have reference materials available to them, such as, dictionaries, thesauruses, and possibly a home computer. Additionally, the parents would act as positive role models by reading, writing, and involving the child in both of these processes. If the teacher feels that the

child does not have these influences at home, a survey could be formed to inquire about the home environment. The results of the survey would then be analyzed and inferences would be drawn to see if there is a correlation between the amount of home influence and spelling achievement.

The literature suggests several underlying causes for lack of spelling achievement. First of all, many students are still using inventive spelling in their everyday writing to spell words that they should already know and are commonly used. According to Routman (1996), inventive spelling is a strategy that can be used by older students, such as sixth graders, but only for words that are new vocabulary words, uncommon words, or words that they would not be expected to know how to spell. Inventive spelling should not be an excuse for sloppy spelling.

Research suggests that another underlying cause of poor spelling achievement is that students are not transferring their learning from spelling to written work. Bloodgood (1991) suggests that since students are only responsible for knowing how to spell the list of words for the length of the week, they are putting the words into their short-term memory. Therefore, the ability to spell these words later in the school year is lost.

Researchers also agree that the lack of phonic skills is a cause of the poor spelling achievement. Calfee, et al. (Davidson and Jenkins, 1994) has found a strong correlation between performance of phonics skills and reading and spelling achievement. The students with low phonics skill ability also have shown difficulty in spelling and reading words.

Another cause of poor spelling achievement may be the lack of integrating spelling into other curriculum areas, such as reading and writing. Many schools teach spelling as a separate subject. In many of these programs, spelling lists are distributed on Monday, studied throughout the week, then tested on Friday. Graves (as cited by Cates, 1988) believes that teaching spelling through exercises and tests for the purpose of learning a list of words, will not help the students spell correctly in other areas. Other researchers also believe that a disjointed spelling program does not help students build their ability to spell. Zutell (as cited by Jongsma, 1990, p. 609) says, "Reading and spelling instruction should be coordinated. Children should not be expected to correctly spell words they cannot read or words they rarely hear or use."

In conclusion, there are many possible causes of poor spelling achievement. A list of possible causes includes, but is not limited to:

*English is not first language

*decreased phonics instruction

*decreased instruction time

*lack of defined spelling curriculum

*home influence

*misuse of inventive spelling strategy

*students' lack of transfer from spelling tests to written work

*the use of traditional spelling program

*spelling is not integrated

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

There are many suggested solutions to help children improve their spelling ability. First, Cunningham and Cunningham (1992) developed a program that works with the invented spelling techniques. Second, several researchers believe that another successful method to help students improve their spelling is the use of individualized spelling lists. Finally, Sitton suggests implementing high-frequency word lists to increase students' spelling achievement. Each of these spelling programs has been shown to be beneficial to children in the classroom.

Cunningham and Cunningham developed a program called Making Words. They based it upon a strong correlation between spelling and word identification. The program developed by Cunningham and Cunningham uses word identification to improve spelling. Making Words is an activity in which the children are given lettered note cards for a selected word. The children begin by making several two letter words, then gradually make words with more letters. The final word includes all the letters the children were given. The goal of this program is to improve children's decoding ability

and awareness of phonics. This will help improve the children's' ability to spell when using invented spelling in their writing.

The Making Words program reaches children on all levels, according to Cunningham and Cunningham (1992). Children who have little phonemic understanding will develop that understanding through classroom activities. Children who understand phonics learn more methods to help decode words and improve spelling in their writing. The various activities in the Making Words program include: finding words that rhyme, looking for spelling patterns, sorting words, and exposure to many words and letter sounds. Combining invented spelling and the Making Words program helps students improve spelling in their writing and decode words in reading.

Many researchers agree that individualized spelling lists have improved students' spelling in the classroom. The words on the individualized spelling lists are words chosen by the students that they feel are important and will be used in their writing later in the classroom. Jim Henry (Novelli, 1993) began using the "Have a Go" method in his classroom. On Mondays, the students scan their work and choose five misspelled words that they would like on their spelling list. These words are written on a piece of paper that is divided into three columns. In the first column, the word is written as it was misspelled in the students' work. The students then try to re-write the word correctly in the second column. In the third column, the correct spelling is written and then studied. When the words are mastered on a test, the word is added to the students' word list. If it is not mastered, it goes on next week's spelling list. Henry has been pleased with this method because the students are using their spelling words in their writing.

Individualized spelling lists have also been found successful by Bill Harp. In his classroom, the students take a pretest to start the lesson. The misspelled words are put in the week's list along with words that the students has chosen from their writing portfolios. The students choose the words that they misspelled in their writing portfolios. All of their spelling words are added to the students' dictionaries alphabetically. On Fridays, the students give each other those spelling tests. Harp finds it very important to link reading, writing, and spelling instruction. "Children frequently write about things they are reading about, and therefore, they should be spelling some of the same words they are reading" (Harp, 1988, p.702).

In Templeton's article, he believes that spelling should include "formal instruction." "Formal instruction is the systematic presentation and study of lists of words" (Templeton, 1991, p.190). Lists of spelling words should all be chosen from words that are being read in the classroom. These words should also have something in common. For example, the short /a/ sound, or a pattern, such as, consonant blends. These words should then be studied with different word play activities.

There are also some classrooms that have two to three spelling lists each week in the classroom. The teacher uses words that are familiar to the students since they are taken from the basal, spelling series, or several books containing word lists. The words are not meaningless to the students. More than one list is made to meet different students' spelling abilities. All of the lists would contain the same spelling pattern that is being studied for the week, a spelling pretest and posttest are given by the teacher to all groups at the same time. "With a little practice, most teachers soon become

comfortable administering words alternately from two to three lists; children master the system quickly" (Bloodgood, 1991, p. 206).

Rebecca Sitton (1996) believes that spelling is learning to spell words correctly in everyday writing. The program she has created is founded upon that philosophy. Sitton's program is generated from a list of high-frequency words compiled from studies analyzing words used in adults' and children's writing. The program consists of two parts: holding students accountable for spelling high-frequency words correctly in their writing, and teaching students spelling and language skills, and concepts.

One major piece of Sitton's formula for increasing student spelling achievement is based on accountability. Sitton believes that students can and should be held accountable for a small number of frequently-used words in their writing. Routman (1993) agrees that teachers should expect students to spell high-frequency words correctly, and to reread their writing to check for meaning, spelling, and punctuation. Sitton recommends that students should be responsible for proofreading all their written work for misspellings of the highest-frequency words. Proofreading skills are built into the program to enable students to be successful at spelling correctly. Other researchers agree that proofreading is an important part of a successful spelling program. Gentry states, "Proofreading lessons increase spelling consciousness. In addition, they will hone in on youngsters' skills of recognizing misspelled words and selecting the best alternative spelling" (Gentry, 1989, p. 98). Also in agreement is Scott (1994) who believes the most important part of a successful spelling program is to teach students how to proofread their own writing. In Sitton's program the students are given a list of

words which they are responsible for spelling correctly every day in every subject. These words are referred to as Priority Words. This short list is taken from a longer list of basic core high-frequency words compiled from several studies of children's compositions. The teacher gradually increases the number of words on this list throughout the year(s).

The second component of Sitton's program is designed to teach the students the skills and concepts of language and spelling. This component of the program also makes use of the aforementioned list of high-frequency words. According to Sitton (1996) the list of high-frequency writing words should be divided among the grade levels. The children should be introduced to these words in order of their frequency of use. A grade level should introduce no more than 200 of these words. This list of words is referred to as the Core Words. Sitton states, "The core words...are not the 'program,' they are the seed from which the program grows, or develops" (Sitton, 1996, p. 12). It is with these words that a teacher would teach all the traditional spelling and language skills. The Core Words are introduced in sets of about two to six words at a time. The teacher uses these words to teach concepts such as patterns, sound-symbol relationships, homophones, multiple-meanings, compound words, and spelling rules.

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of implementing a new spelling program, during the period of September 1996 to January 1997, the targeted second and third grade classes will increase their ability to spell the frequently used words in their written work as measured by teacher-made checklists which measure individual and class spelling performance in their written work.

In order to accomplish the terminal objective, the following processes are necessary to follow. The first process is to identify the class's spelling ability. This will be done by a pretest and dictation sentences of the first 50 high-frequency words. The next step to follow is to gather materials that are needed to teach spelling through frequently-used words. Student folders will be developed to organize the students, and a letter will be sent home to inform the parents. Finally, a series of activities that help develop spelling skills will be constructed by incorporating Sitton's Sourcebook. This book is a guide for teaching and extending high-use writing words. These are the processes that are necessary to accomplish the project objectives.

Action Plan for Intervention

1. Spelling improvement
    A. Identify spelling ability
        1. Pretest of frequently used words 1-50 (Appendix A)
        2. Dictation sentences using words 1-50 (Appendix B)
        3. Tally results for whole class
            a. Determine starting point for priority word list
                1. Priority Words- the "no-excuse" words students are responsible for spelling correctly in their independent everyday writing. These words must be spelled and proofread with accuracy, everyday all day long, in every subject
    B. Preparation
        1. Inform parents of program
            a. Letter (Appendices C and D)
            b. Curriculum Night
        2. Set-up spelling folders
            a. Frequently-used words list adhered on front of folder
                1. Priority Words highlighted with marker
            b. Student dictionary
                1. Priority Words in red
                2. Core Words and other words in pencil

a. Core Words- words from the word list that are used to teach any and all spelling and language skills and concepts to develop long range spelling and language strategies

3. Create a word wall of the Priority Words
   a. Either all 100 frequently used words,
   b. Or put words up as they become Priority Words

C. Spelling Program
1. Word list
   a. Three to five Priority Words
   b. Two to six Core Words
      1. Second grade uses words 1-99
      2. Third grade uses words 100-199 (Appendix E)
2. Priority Words
   a. Highlight with marker on spelling folder
   b. Add Priority Words to the student dictionary in red pen
   c. Next three to five words will be added to the word list
3. Core Words
   a. Starting at grade level cut-off, the next five words are added to the word list
4. Preview
   a. Preview-Review activity (Appendicies F and G)
5. Springboard Activities- come from Core Words and are used to provide extension through ongoing opportunities to develop skills and concepts that facilitate strategic understandings
   a. Many taken from Sitton's Sourcebook 2
      1. Sound/phonics
         a. Sound-symbol awareness
         b. Word analysis
         c. Consonant blends
      2. Structure/patterns
         a. Patterns
         b. Compound words
         c. Double letters
      3. Rules/generalizations
         a. Change /y/ to an /i/ and add /-es/
      4. Language skills
         a. Homophones
         b. Synonyms
         c. Book tie-ins
   b. Any springboard words may be added to student dictionary in pencil

6. Review
    a. Done once the teacher feels the Core Words are well studied
    b. Preview/Review activity again
7. Start over at step C with new Priority and Core Words

D. Assessment
1. Ongoing
    a. Weekly individual assessment from writing sample (Appendix H)
    b. Tally sheet kept for each student (Appendix I)
    c. Monthly class tally of misspelled words
2. Final
    a. Posttest of 50 frequently used words
    b. Dictation sentences using same 50 words

Action Plan Timeline

September

-Identify spelling ability:

-give students pretest and dictation of frequently used words

-tally results for whole class

-determine starting point for Priority Word list

-Inform parents about program with letter and also at Curriculum Night

-Set up spelling folders

-Begin spelling program

-three to five Priority Words

-two to six Core Words

-Preview/Review activity

-Springboard Activities (one a day for 30 minutes or so)

-Weekly individual assessment from selected student writing sample

-Monthly class tally of misspelled words

October

-Change and add three to five Priority Words and two to six Core Words to meet the needs of the class

-When changed give Preview/Review activity

-Springboard activities (one a day for 30 minutes or so)

-Weekly individual assessment

-Monthly class tally

November

-Change and add three to five Priority Words and two to six Core Words to meet the needs of the class

-When changed give Preview/Review activity

-Springboard activities (one a day for 30 minutes or so)

-Weekly individual assessment

-Monthly class tally

December

-Change and add three to five Priority Words and two to six Core Words to meet the needs of the class

-When changed give Preview/Review activity

-Springboard activities (one a day for 30 minutes or so)

-Weekly individual assessment

-Monthly class tally

January

-Change and add three to five Priority Words and two to six Core Words to meet the needs of the class

-When changed give Preview/Review activity

-Springboard activities (one a day for 30 minutes or so)

-Weekly individual assessment

-Monthly class tally

-Give students posttest of 50 frequently used words

-Give students same dictation sentences again that contain words 1-50

-Tally results of both tests for whole class

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the intervention, weekly samples of students' writings will be collected and graded for spelling. Only the priority words will be graded. In addition, a monthly tally of individual student errors will be tabulated from the students' writings. At the end of the research, a posttest of frequently used words 1-50 and dictation sentences will be given and tallied again. All of these tests and tallies will be held as part of the assessment process.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to improve students' spelling achievement in everyday writing. The implementation of a core list of high frequency words and a series of activities that help develop spelling skills were selected to effect the desired change.

The students were pretested on the first 50 high-frequency words. The researchers tested using the standard spelling test method. The researchers said the word, used it in a sentence, and then repeated the word as the students wrote it. To better accommodate the second graders' attention span and anxiety level, the test was given over several days. In order to gain a clearer understanding of the students' abilities to write in context, dictation sentences were also given. The researchers read nine sentences containing the 50 most frequently used words to the children. The sentences used for dictation can be found in Appendix B. The third graders used standard notebook paper to record the dictated sentences. The second grade students had difficulty writing the first five dictation sentences. They were, therefore, given photocopied papers with the appropriate number of blank spaces to coincide with the

number of words in each dictated sentence. The results of both tests were tallied by each teacher and recorded on the Record Keeper found in Appendix A.

After analyzing the pretests the researchers decided that the second graders' Priority List would begin at high-frequency word number one, "the". However, after analyzing the results of the third graders' assessments the researchers determined that their Priority List would contain high-frequency words one through eighteen. The preparation then continued as stated in the Chapter 3 outline.

As stated in Chapter 3 each list consisted of three to five Priority Words and two to six Core Words depending upon the needs of the class. New lists were created on an average of once every two weeks. The researchers used the Preview/Review activity when introducing the new words. (Appendices F and G) During the two weeks of study of the Core Words the students participated in Springboard Activities on a daily basis. The researchers assessed a random writing sample from each student on a weekly basis. The researchers eliminated monthly tallies, because there were so few errors in the random samples taken.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the effects of the implemented spelling program on spelling achievement, the researchers analyzed the pretest and posttest data. These data were compiled in September of 1996 and again in December 1996, and are presented in Figures 5-8. During the fall and winter when data were collected, two students moved out of the targeted classrooms and four moved into the targeted classrooms.

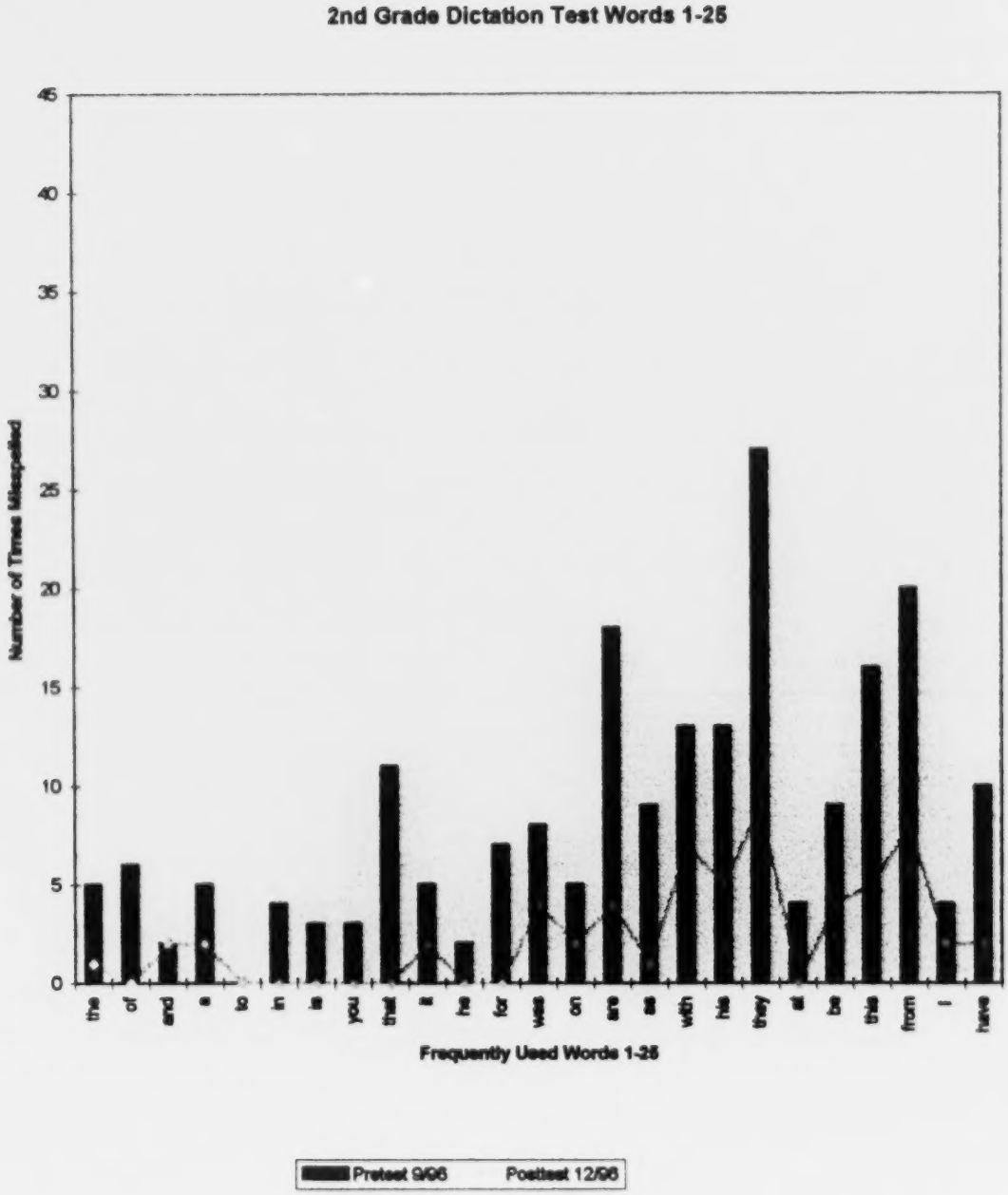

Figure 5a. Second grade dictation test words 1-25

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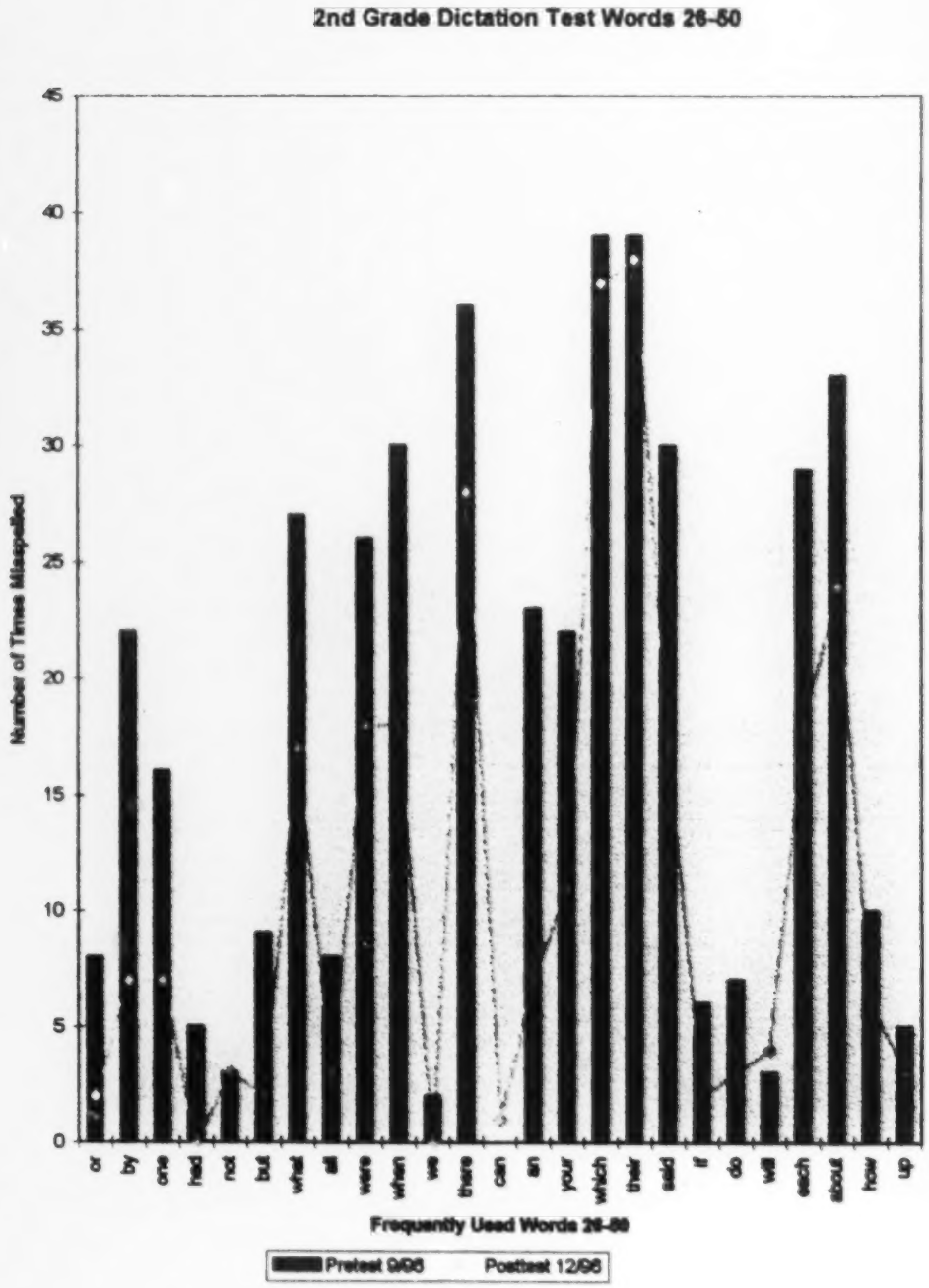

Figure 5b. Second grade dictation test words 26-50

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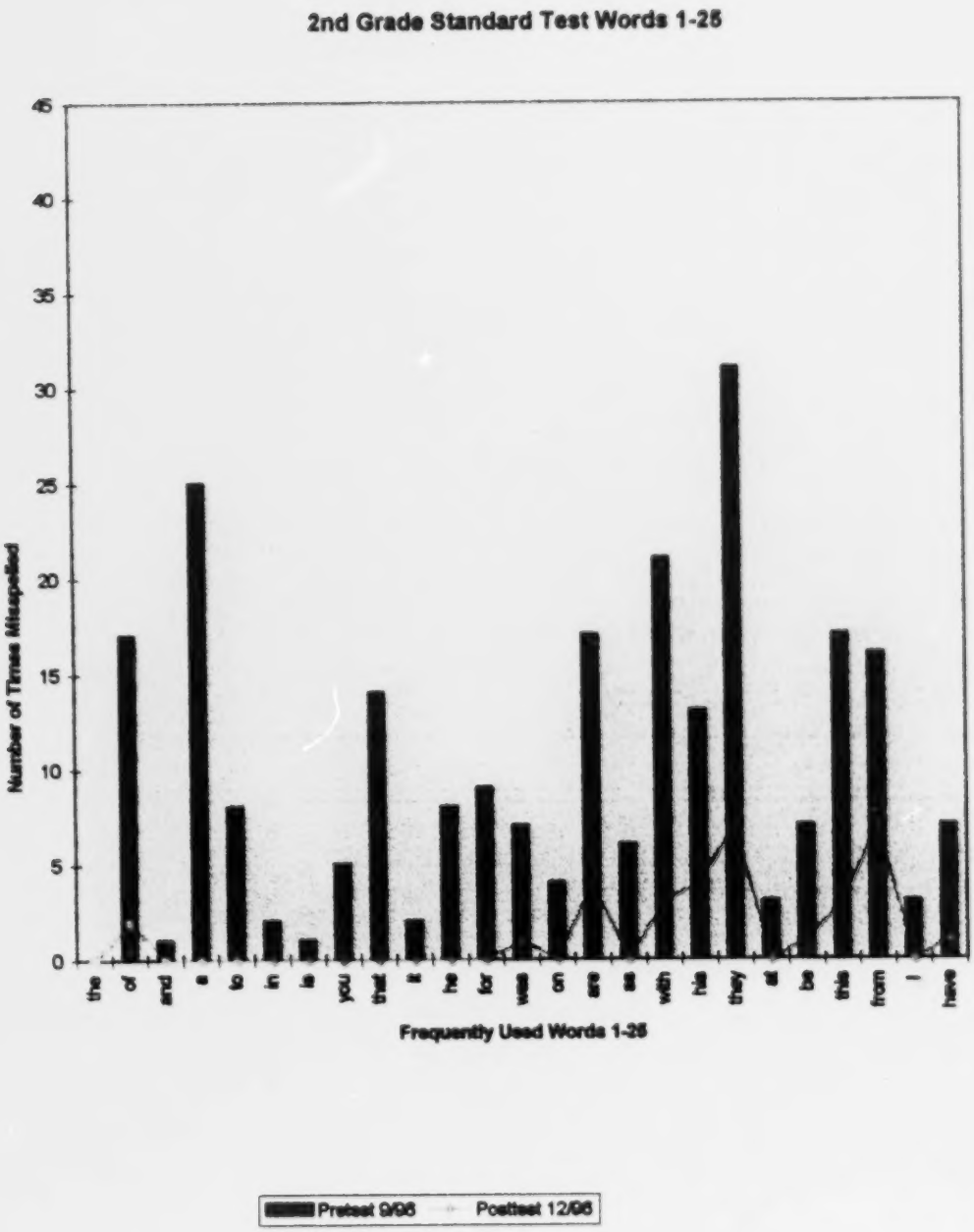

Figure 6a. Second grade standard test words 1-25

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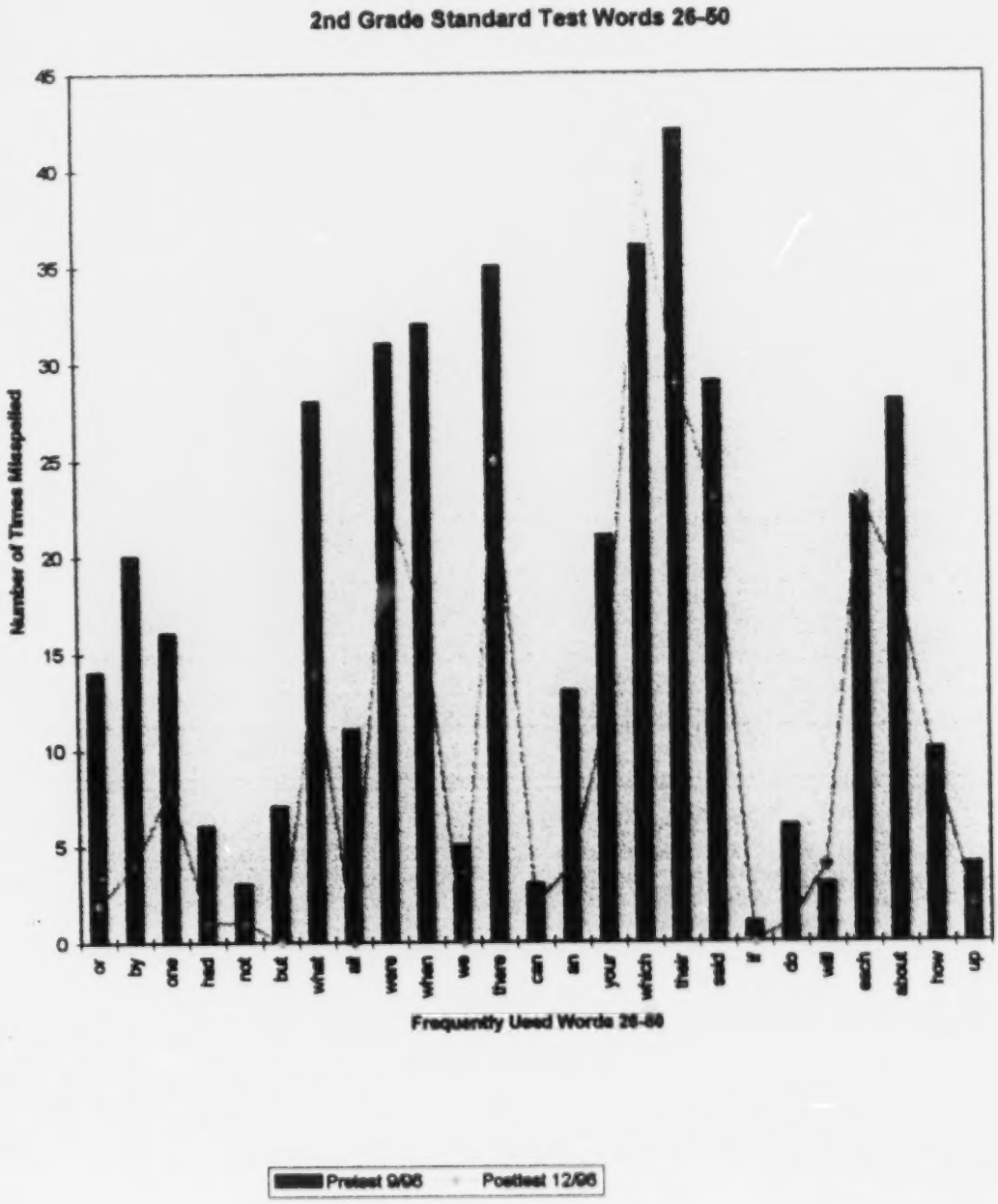

Figure 6b. Second grade standard test words 26-50

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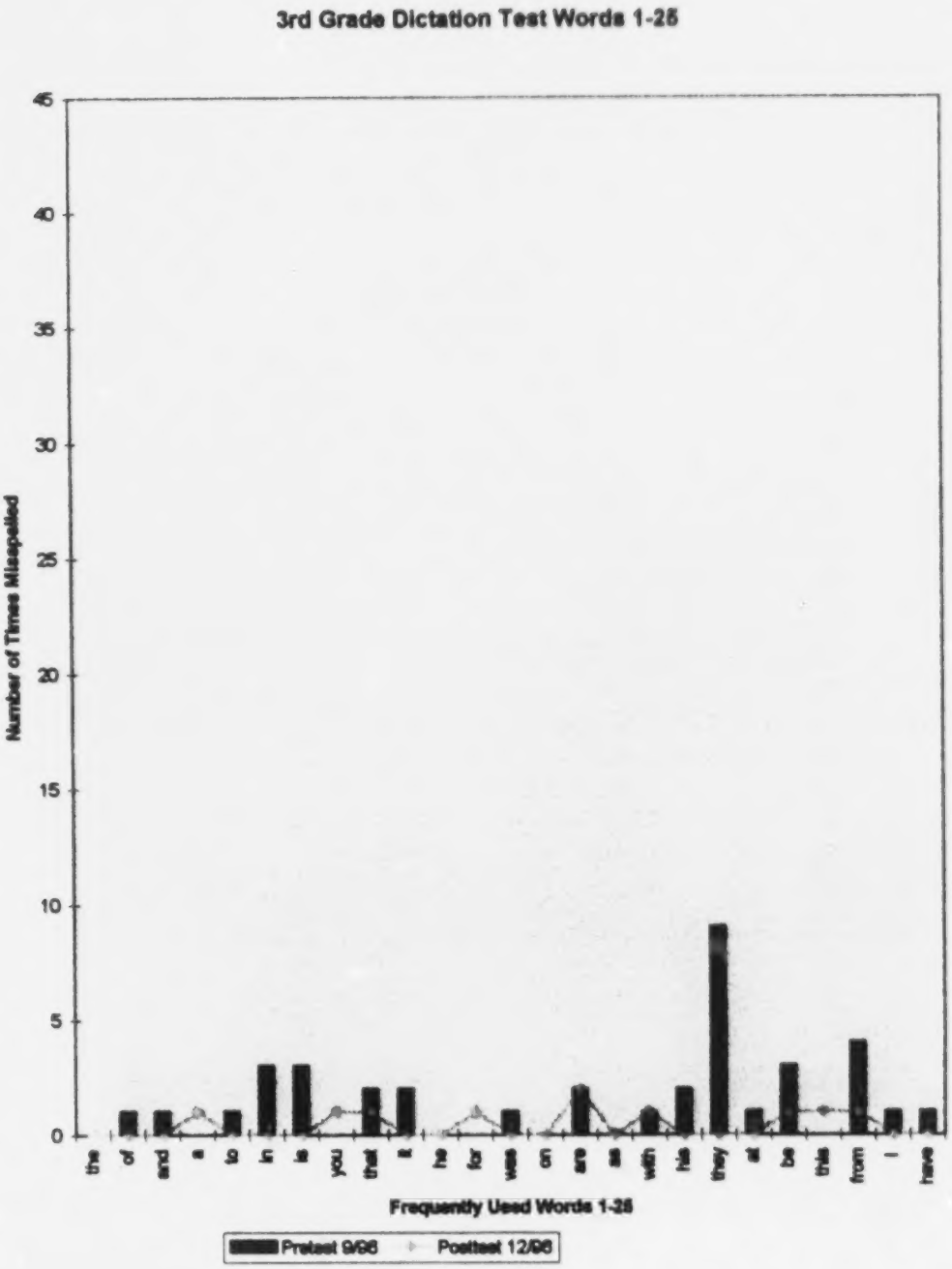

Figure 7a. Third grade dictation test words 1-25

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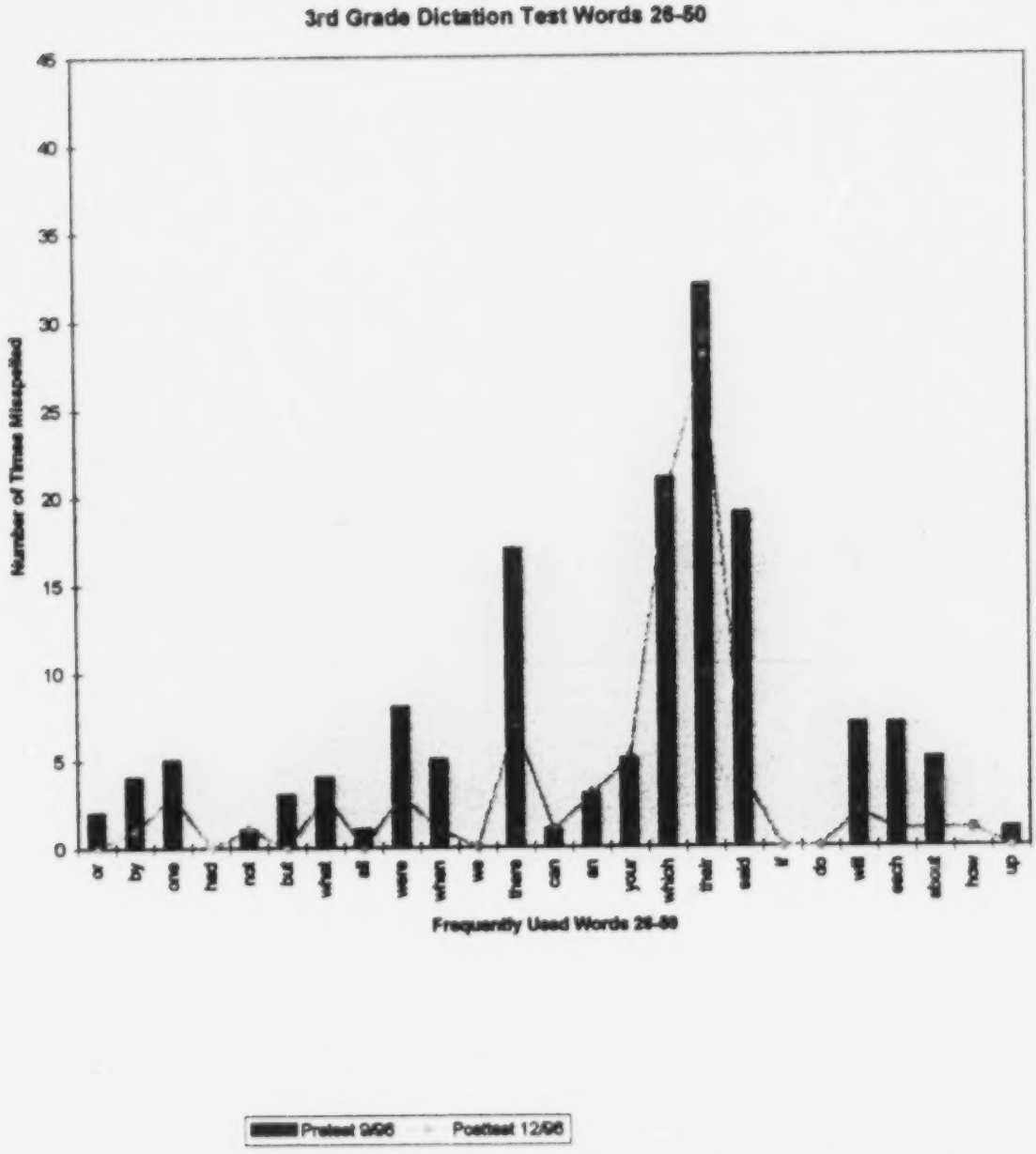

Figure 7b. Third grade dictation test words 26-50

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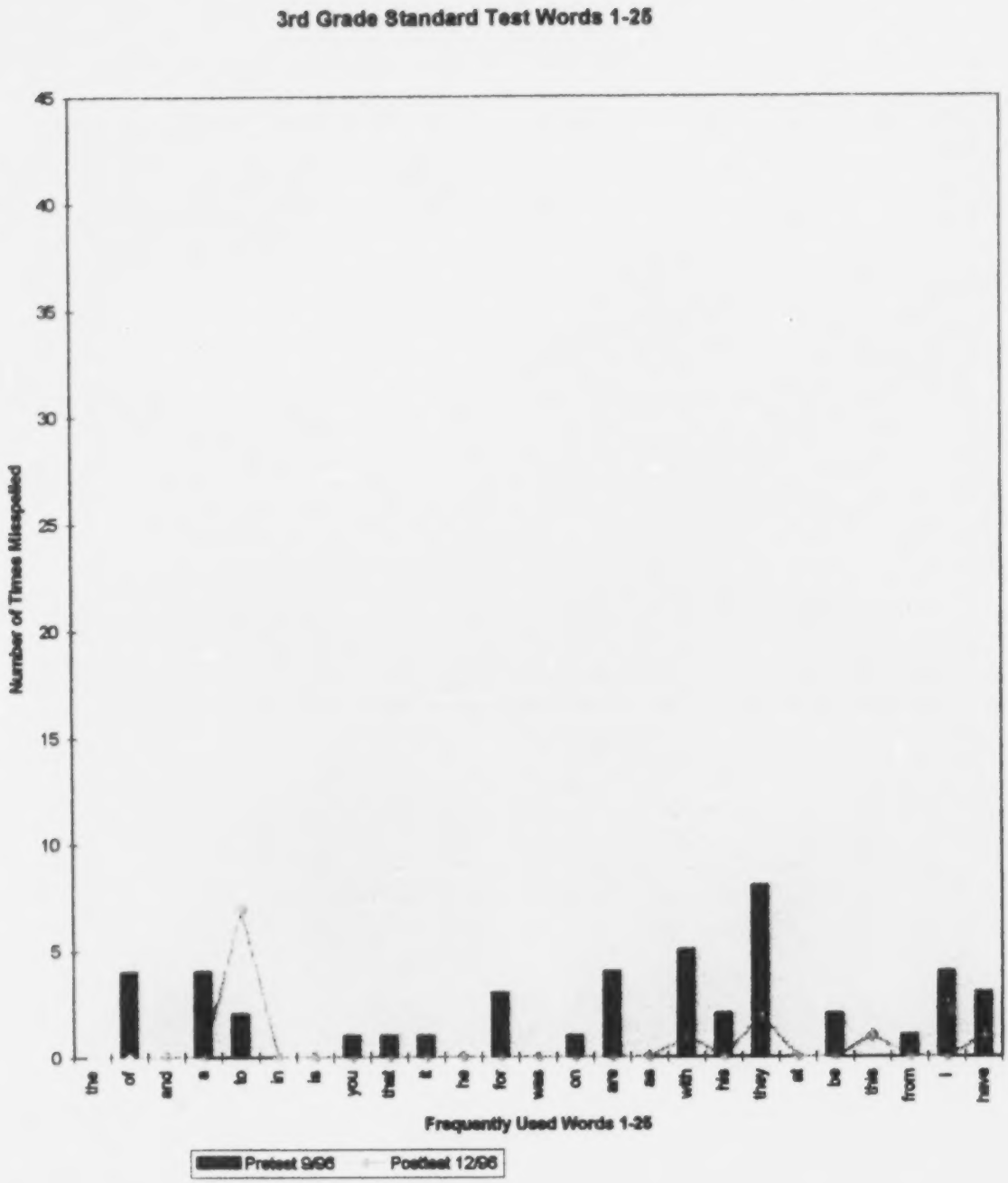

Figure 8a. Third grade standard test words 1-25

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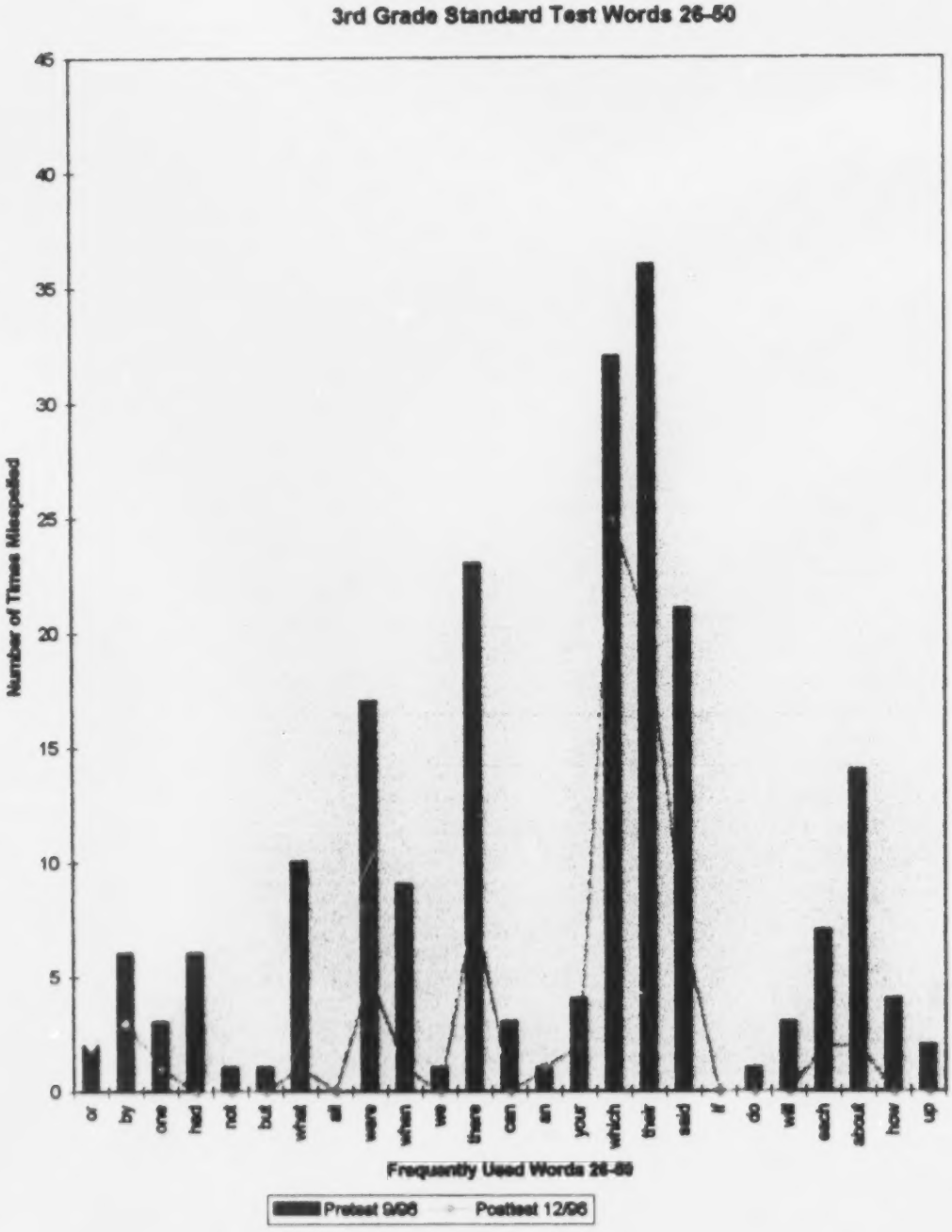

Figure 8b. Third grade standard test words 26-50

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The intervention appears to have had a positive effect on the targeted second and third grade students. The data show a decline in the number of spelling errors made by the targeted students. For example, the second graders showed a 19% improvement on the standard posttest. The third grade students showed an 8% improvement on the standard posttest. On the dictation posttest the second grade students improved 14%, and the third grade students improved by 5%.

Table 2

Pretest and Posttest Errors and Omissions

	Second Grade	Third Grade
Standard Test		
Pretest	685	253
Posttest	282	92
Dictation Test		
Pretest	647	191
Posttest	336	94

When both posttests were given in December to the second grade students, they had already studied the words 1 through 21. A significant decline in errors was noted on the spelling of word number nine, "that", by the targeted second grade students. At the time of the standard pretest fourteen second grade students misspelled the word "that". After skill building activities and adding the word to their Priority Word list, no students misspelled the word "that" on the standard posttest. The students also showed

significant improvement in their spelling of word number seventeen, "with". On the standard pretest 21 second grade students misspelled the word, but only three second grade students misspelled the word on the posttest. See Figure 6A. In addition, the second grade students demonstated an increased ability to spell the word, "they", on both the standard and dictation tests. The standard pretest showed 31 students misspelled the word. On the standard posttest only seven second grade students misspelled the word. The dictation test revealed that 27 students misspelled the word "they" on the pretest. After the word was added to the Priority List only nine of the targeted second grade students misspelled the word on the posttest. See Figures 5A and 6A.

At the time of the posttest, third grade students were responsible for words 1 through 39. A significant decline in errors was noted on the spelling of word 34, "were" by the third grade students on the standard posttest. On the standard pretest 17 students misspelled the word, "were". The posttest showed that only five students misspelled the word. On the standard pretest third graders misspelled the word "their", number 37, a total of 23 times. On the standard posttest it was only misspelled eight times. See Figure 8B.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of the data on spelling improvement, the students showed a marked increase in spelling achievement. The students showed evidence of transfer of learning from the Springboard Activities to their daily writing. In

addition, the students applied several spelling rules learned which helped them spell accurately.

Since the targeted students were held accountable for spelling the high-frequency words, it encouraged them to carefully proofread their work. Fewer papers were turned in with spelling errors. It was evident that students understood that "spelling counted."

Another reason for the success of the program was that the students' spelling lists consisted of words occurring most frequently in our written language. Therefore, the words they studied were constantly reinforced through authentic writing assignments.

Overall, the researchers felt that the spelling improvement program had many positive components. The program was user friendly. For example, the Sourcebooks provided a variety of spelling activities for each high-frequency word. The researchers also found that the implemented activities addressed many of the intelligences. Many of the activities included cutting, acting, and counting using the high-frequency words. Finally, the students looked forward to the exciting daily spelling activities. The researchers felt the cooperative learning activities made the activities come alive for the students.

If one was to implement this program, the researchers recommend a few modifications. First, it would be most beneficial to the students if the program was implemented throughout the school because it would provide consistency from year to year. Second, each teacher should consider their needs as well as the students', parents', and administrators' when developing a record keeping system. Some

researchers preferred weekly tallies while others preferred to keep an ongoing list of misspelled words from the random writing samples. Since the writing samples are taken on different days of the week and from different subjects, scoring the samples can easily be overlooked.

As a result of this study, the researchers will continue to use this spelling program in the future. Due to the successfulness of the program, the administration has chosen to adopt the program in the kindergarten through second grade building. The parents of the participating students shared many positive comments about the program with the researchers. Fellow teachers were also interested in finding more information about the program to be used in their classrooms.

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Appendix A
Record Keeper

Record Keeper

Form 1

word frequency 1-50

Name _____

1 the	18 his	35 when
2 of	19 they	36 we
3 and	20 at	37 there
4 a	21 be	38 can
5 to	22 this	39 an
6 in	23 from	40 your
7 is	24 I	41 which
8 you	25 have	42 their
9 that	26 or	43 said
10 it	27 by	44 if
11 he	28 one	45 do
12 for	29 had	46 will
13 was	30 not	47 each
14 on	31 but	48 about
15 are	32 what	49 how
16 as	33 all	50 up
17 with	34 were	

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50

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Appendix B
Dictation Sentences

1. We have not said which one we will do.
2. About how many boys can there be by your house?
3. What were all their toys doing up by the hill?
4. When an apple or orange is in your lunch, eat it.
5. He was at this store with his mom and dad.
6. A girl from that room went for a drink out of each sink.
7. Are you and I on the list?
8. They want to be with us, but if they can't, they won't.
9. They had as many pizzas as they wanted.

Appendix C
Second Grade Parent Letter

Dear Parents,

This year we are introducing a new spelling program to your child. It clearly emphasizes correct spelling in writing--a goal that we know you support. The program is committed to the absolute mastery in writing of the highest-frequency words--those words that are used most frequently through a lifetime of writing. These words are the Priority Words. These words *must be spelled and used correctly* on all your child's everyday assignments.

Your child will soon have a short list of Priority Words. He or she will have a copy of the list at school and one copy will be sent home to you. We have high standards for this expectation to ensure that your child will take it seriously. Random writing samples will be checked to tell your child how well the expectation is being met. It follows then, that your child's spelling grade will be largely based on the level of commitment these papers reflect.

This change creates a rehearsal for real-world use of spelling. Students are no longer tested on Friday word lists, but assessed the way adults' spelling is assessed in the workplace and the community--in everyday writing. Now there is a test *every* school day, every time your child writes. This is a positive effort to help your child learn to be accountable for spelling.

In addition to spelling accountability in writing, this program teaches "spelling logic." This includes ongoing activities on traditional skills, such as phonics, word origins, spelling patterns, and spelling rules.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Durnil
Mrs. Goldstein

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Appendix D
Third Grade Parent Letter

Dear Parents,

This year I am introducing a new spelling program to your child. It is part of my research needed for my master's degree through St. Xavier University that I will receive in May of 1997. It clearly emphasizes correct spelling in writing--- a goal that I know you support. The program is committed to the absolute mastery in writing high-frequency words---those words that are used most frequently through a lifetime of writing. These words are the Priority Words. These words must be spelled and used correctly on **all** your child's everyday assignments. Additional "special" words will be added to this list for a brief time as students write about a particular topic.

Your child has a list of Priority Words at school and one copy for you is on the back of this letter. Random writing samples will be checked to tell your child how well they are spelling. It follows then, that your child's spelling grade will be largely based on their ability to spell the high-frequency words.

Students are no longer tested on Friday word lists, but assessed the way adults' spelling is assessed in the workplace and the community--in everyday writing. Now there is a test *every* school day, every time your child writes. This is a positive effort to help your child learn to be accountable for spelling.

In addition to spelling accountability in writing, this program teaches "spelling logic." This includes ongoing activities on traditional skills, such as phonics, word origins, spelling patterns, and spelling rules. These activities focus on spelling development.

This new program will be discussed further at Open House on Wednesday, September 11th at 7:00 P.M. Until then, if you have any comments or questions, please feel free to call me at Diamond Lake School at 566-6601. Remember, these words must be spelled correctly every time your child writes, in every subject. In time, more words will be added to this list to ensure ongoing spelling growth. Now spelling in writing "counts!"

Sincerely,

Mrs. [illegible]

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Appendix E
High-Frequency Words

78 *Word Bank of 1200 High-Frequency Writing Words*

frequency	word	frequency	word	frequency	word	frequency	word	frequency	word
1	the	49	how	97	just	145	number	193	want
2	of	50	up	98	where	146	great	194	school
3	and	51	out	99	most	147	tell	195	important
4	a	52	them	100	know	148	men	196	until
5	to	53	then	101	get	149	say	197	form
6	in	54	she	102	through	150	small	198	food
7	is	55	many	103	back	151	every	199	keep
8	you	56	some	104	much	152	found	200	children
9	that	57	so	105	go	153	still	201	feet
10	it	58	these	106	good	154	between	202	land
11	he	59	would	107	new	155	name	203	side
12	for	60	other	108	write	156	should	204	without
13	was	61	into	109	our	157	home	205	boy
14	on	62	has	110	me	158	big	206	once
15	are	63	more	111	man	159	give	207	animal
16	as	64	her	112	too	160	air	208	life
17	with	65	two	113	any	161	line	209	enough
18	his	66	like	114	day	162	set	210	took
19	they	67	him	115	same	163	own	211	four
20	at	68	see	116	right	164	under	212	head
21	be	69	time	117	look	165	read	213	above
22	this	70	could	118	think	166	last	214	kind
23	from	71	no	119	also	167	never	215	began
24	I	72	make	120	around	168	us	216	almost
25	have	73	than	121	another	169	left	217	live
26	or	74	first	122	came	170	end	218	page
27	by	75	been	123	come	171	along	219	got
28	one	76	its	124	work	172	while	220	earth
29	had	77	who	125	three	173	might	221	need
30	not	78	now	126	must	174	next	222	far
31	but	79	people	127	because	175	sound	223	hand
32	what	80	my	128	does	176	below	224	high
33	all	81	made	129	part	177	saw	225	year
34	were	82	over	130	even	178	something	226	mother
35	when	83	did	131	place	179	thought	227	light
36	we	84	down	132	well	180	both	228	country
37	there	85	only	133	such	181	few	229	father
38	can	86	way	134	here	182	those	230	let
39	an	87	find	135	take	183	always	231	night
40	your	88	use	136	why	184	show	232	picture
41	which	89	may	137	help	185	large	233	being
42	their	90	water	138	put	186	often	234	study
43	said	91	long	139	different	187	together	235	second
44	if	92	little	140	away	188	asked	236	soon
45	do	93	very	141	again	189	house	237	story
46	will	94	after	142	off	190	don't	238	since
47	each	95	words	143	went	191	world	239	white
48	about	96	called	144	old	192	going	240	ever

Appendix F
Second Grade Preview/Review

Preview/Review

Form 1

Name _____

My Preview ☐ _____

My Review ☐ Date _____

Write	Rewrite
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	

100

Appendix G
Third Grade Preview/Review

Form 2

Preview/Review

Name _____ Date _____ Preview ____ Review ____

Write	Rewrite
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	
11.	
12.	
13.	
14.	
15.	

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Grading Sheet

Grading Sheet

Name: _____
Taken from: _____
Date: _____

O = Incorrect

1. the	18. his	35. when
2. of	19. they	36. we
3. and	20. at	37. there
4. a	21. be	38. can
5. to	22. this	39. an
6. in	23. from	40. your
7. is	24. I	41. which
8. you	25. have	42. their
9. that	26. or	43. said
10. it	27. by	44. if
11. he	28. one	45. do
12. for	29. had	46. will
13. was	30. not	47. each
14. on	31. but	48. about
15. are	32. what	49. how
16. as	33. all	50. up
17. with	34. were	51. out

Grading Sheet

Name: _____
Taken from: _____
Date: _____

O = Incorrect

1. the	18. his	35. when
2. of	19. they	36. we
3. and	20. at	37. there
4. a	21. be	38. can
5. to	22. this	39. an
6. in	23. from	40. your
7. is	24. I	41. which
8. you	25. have	42. their
9. that	26. or	43. said
10. it	27. by	44. if
11. he	28. one	45. do
12. for	29. had	46. will
13. was	30. not	47. each
14. on	31. but	48. about
15. are	32. what	49. how
16. as	33. all	50. up
17. with	34. were	51. out

Grading Sheet

Name: _____
Taken from: _____
Date: _____

O = Incorrect

1. the	18. his	35. when
2. of	19. they	36. we
3. and	20. at	37. there
4. a	21. be	38. can
5. to	22. this	39. an
6. in	23. from	40. your
7. is	24. I	41. which
8. you	25. have	42. their
9. that	26. or	43. said
10. it	27. by	44. if
11. he	28. one	45. do
12. for	29. had	46. will
13. was	30. not	47. each
14. on	31. but	48. about
15. are	32. what	49. how
16. as	33. all	50. up
17. with	34. were	51. out

Grading Sheet

Name: _____
Taken from: _____
Date: _____

O = Incorrect

1. the	18. his	35. when
2. of	19. they	36. we
3. and	20. at	37. there
4. a	21. be	38. can
5. to	22. this	39. an
6. in	23. from	40. your
7. is	24. I	41. which
8. you	25. have	42. their
9. that	26. or	43. said
10. it	27. by	44. if
11. he	28. one	45. do
12. for	29. had	46. will
13. was	30. not	47. each
14. on	31. but	48. about
15. are	32. what	49. how
16. as	33. all	50. up
17. with	34. were	51. out

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Appendix I
Tally Sheet

1	the	51	out
2	of	52	them
3	and	53	then
4	a	54	she
5	to	55	many
6	in	56	some
7	is	57	so
8	you	58	these
9	that	59	would
10	it	60	other
11	he	61	into
12	for	62	has
13	was	63	more
14	on	64	her
15	are	65	two
16	as	66	like
17	with	67	him
18	his	68	see
19	they	69	time
20	at	70	could
21	be	71	no
22	this	72	make
23	from	73	than
24	I	74	first
25	have	75	been
26	or	76	its
27	by	77	who
28	one	78	now
29	had	79	people
30	not	80	my
31	but	81	made
32	what	82	over
33	all	83	did
34	were	84	down
35	when	85	only
36	we	86	way
37	there	87	find
38	can	88	use
39	an	89	may
40	your	90	water
41	which	91	long
42	their	92	little
43	said	93	very
44	if	94	after
45	do	95	words
46	will	96	called
47	each	97	just
48	about	98	where
49	how	99	most
50	up	100	know

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Appendix J
Second Grade Dictation Sheet

1. _____ _____ _____ _____
_____ _____ _____ _____ _____.

2. _____ _____ _____ _____
_____ _____ _____ _____ _____
_____?

3. _____ _____ _____ _____
_____ _____ _____ _____
_____ _____?